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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 005351

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/14/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [OSCE](#)

SUBJECT: GOT DENIES IT PLANS TO CLOSE HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE

REF: ANKARA 5163

Classified by Polcouns Janice G. Weiner; reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶11. (U) The Prime Ministry issued a written statement September 8 denying press reports indicating that the GOT had decided against the creation of an independent human rights institution and was considering closing the existing Human Rights Presidency (reftel). According to the statement, the GOT is working to make the Human Rights Presidency "more independent, functional and more harmonious with the principles of the United Nations."

¶12. (C) The Danish Embassy and the Danish Institute for Human Rights had been working with the GOT on a project aimed at creating an independent human rights institution in Turkey similar to the Danish Institute. Vahit Bicak, head of the Human Rights Presidency, told us and the Danish DCM September 1 that he decided to leave his post after PM Erdogan told him he did not support the establishment of an independent institution (reftel). Sema Kilicer, political officer at the European Commission Representation to Turkey, told us she raised the issue with GOT officials on September 7, warning that the closure of the Human Rights Presidency would be noted in the next EU progress report on Turkey.

¶13. (C) Following the September 8 Prime Ministry announcement, the Danish DCM told us he was encouraged by the GOT's apparent change of heart. However, he said it was not clear what the GOT's intentions are. There has been no progress in recent months in the discussions between Denmark and the GOT on the independent institution. If in fact the GOT intends to establish a new human rights institution, he said, the independence and effectiveness of the new agency will likely depend on how closely it conforms to UN principles relating to national human rights institutions (known as the "Paris Principles").

Comment

¶14. (C) The GOT has neglected the Human Rights Presidency since creating the office in 1997. It appears that GOT leaders may now have factored into their decision-making process the potential impact of criticism from the EU and the human rights community. We will follow developments to determine whether the GOT genuinely intends to turn the office into an independent institution.

MCELDOWNEY